

## The teasing habit

*Our twelve-year-old boy has developed the habit of teasing. His principal targets are his friends, but on occasion he also treats relatives and other adults in the same manner. At times I can overlook this behavior, but there are occasions when I become quite annoyed. How can I help him curb this habit?*

MRS. P.M.O.

It is interesting that your youngster's behavior is sometimes easy for you to accept and at other times apparently strikes you as being objectionable. You probably sense that many different things can be expressed under the simple guise of teasing.

Teasing can have a variety of meanings for youngsters as well as adults and understanding it is further complicated when we recognize that several motives can be operating at the same time. Take, for example, the three-year-old who happily waves a new toy at his friends with the greeting: "I have something you don't have!" At first glance this may appear to be a challenging taunt calculated to start a struggle. Indeed, Johnny may partly hope for precisely this outcome. On the other hand, it may also be his way of inviting the others to play with him.

Teasing is often an expression of hostility. By embarrassing others and making them feel unsure of themselves, the teaser is often seeking to appease his own uncertainties. It can, however, also be an expression of affection. While it is true that there may be some measure of hostility even in "good-natured kidding," respect and admiration for its recipient enter in, too.

Teasing can also serve as an "ice-breaker," and sometimes offers the shy person a convenient conversational lead. In fact, in our society the ability to engage in friendly banter is often the mark of a "sophisticated" person. Adolescents, particularly, strive to emulate the "smart" dia-

logue they hear in the movies and on television.

So we can see why parents respond differently to teasing on different occasions. When teasing is essentially a friendly attempt to relate to others, even when it's a clumsy effort, we can view it as part of the growing-up trials and errors children need to experience. However, when such efforts are inappropriate or go too far, parents do well to point out to their children that they are overdoing it, and to put a stop to it.

When it becomes apparent that unfriendly impulses consistently spark his teasing, a youngster may be in need of help in coping with his aggressive feelings. Accepting his right to be jealous or angry sometimes, and explaining that we all have these feelings, will show him that despite his teasing habits, he is still a member of the family in good standing. If he feels your understanding and support, his energies may be freed for better use. You can also follow this up with definite suggestions of activities he is likely to enjoy. Simply scolding a child who relies too much on teasing to "get across" to other people will not be likely to break the habit.

## Index to Vol. XXXV

Issues are designated by the appropriate initials for Winter 1957-58, Spring, Summer, Fall 1958. Every issue of CHILD STUDY is completely indexed in the Education Index.

*Achievements: Its Cost and Satisfaction.* Elisabeth R. Geleerd, M.D., S 3

Allen, Frederick H., M.D. *The Dilemmas of Growth—for Parents and Children*, Sp 4

Arnstein, Helene S. *Backstage with the Book Review Committee*, Sp 32

Auerbach, Aline B. *Can an Infant be Spoiled?* W 10

*Backstage with the Book Review Committee.* Helene S. Arnstein, Sp 32

Book Reviews, W 31; Sp 27; S 35; F 37

Booklists. *Books of the Year for Children*, W 38, *Children's Books—Especially for Summer*, S 39; *New Books about Parenthood and Family Life*, W 33; Sp 30; S 36; F 39; *Science Books for Children: "Imagination's Other Place,"*

- Sp 34
- Bossard, James H. S. *Growing Up in a Large Family*, F 3
- Can an Infant be Spoiled?* Aline B. Auerbach, W 10
- Can Your Child See Red?* Israel Dvorine, O.D., Sp 40
- Climate of Achievement, The*. Dale B. Harris, S 8
- Conant, James B. *Some Problems of the American High School*, F 26
- CSAA Reports, W 34; Sp 42; S 44
- Dilemmas of Growth—for Parents and Children, The*. Frederick H. Allen, M.D., Sp 4
- Disabled Readers—Are They Getting the Right Help?* Robert Karlin, W 59
- Dvorine, Israel, O.D. *Science Says — Can Your Child See Red?* Sp 40
- Education—Mirror of Society*. Diana Trilling, S 23
- Family in Action, The*. Fred L. Strodtbeck, S 14
- Feldman, Yonata. *The Meaning of Acceptance*, Sp 20
- Geleerd, Elisabeth R., M.D. *Achievement: Its Cost and Satisfaction*, S 3
- Ginzberg, Eli. *The Pursuit of Excellence*, S 30
- Growing Up in a Large Family*. James H. S. Bossard, F 3
- Harris, Dale B. *The Climate of Achievement*, S 8; *Research on the Effects of Permissive Rearing*, W 28
- Helping Your Child to Understand Death*. Anna W. M. Wolf, W 36
- How Do They Manage? Problems of big families discussed by six mothers*. F 7
- How Much Can We Ask of Our Schools?* Martin H. Stein, M.D., Sp 23
- How Not to Spoil a Child*. Robert Sunley, W 4
- Is the Large Family Coming Back?* Clyde V. Kiser, F 23
- Karlin, Robert. *Disabled Readers—Are They Getting the Right Help?* W 59
- Katherine M. Wolf—*In Memoriam*, W. 2
- Keeping Up With the Jones Clan*. Andrea W. Rabinowitz, F 14
- Kiser, Clyde V. *Is the Large Family Coming Back?* F 23
- Made to Order: a Middle-sized Family*. Joanne B. Nason, F 20
- Meaning of Acceptance, The*. Yonata Feldman, Sp 20
- Moustakas, Clark E. *Spoiled Behavior in the School-age Child*, W 16
- Murray, James B. *Seven Sons and a Farm—a Father's Tale*, F 16
- Nason, Joanne B. *Made to Order: a Middle-sized Family*, F 20
- Neisser, Edith G. *Some Like Them Young*, Sp 13
- Pamphlets Received, S 38, F 41
- Panel Discussion, S 33
- Parents' Questions, Sp 37; F 42
- Present Imperative: Conviction, The*. Adlai E. Stevenson, F 32
- Pursuit of Excellence, The*. Eli Ginzberg, S 30
- Rabinowitz, Andrea W. *Keeping Up with the Jones Clan*, F 14
- Science Says. *Can Your Child See Red?* Israel Dvorine, M.D., Sp 58; *Research on the Effects of Permissive Rearing*. Dale B. Harris, W 28
- Seven Sons and a Farm—a Father's Tale*. James B. Murray, F 16
- Some Like Them Young*. Edith G. Neisser, Sp 13
- Some Problems of the American High School*. James B. Conant, F 26
- Spoiled Behavior in the School-age Child*. Clark E. Moustakas, W 16
- Stein, Martin H., M.D. *How Much Can We Ask of Our Schools?* Sp 23
- Stevenson, Adlai E. *The Present Imperative: Conviction*, F 32
- Strodtbeck, Fred L. *The Family in Action*, S 14
- Sunley, Robert. *How Not to Spoil a Child*, W 4
- Taylor, Harold. *The "Unillusioned" Generation*, S 19
- Time Out for Parents*. Elinor Pettengill Zaki, Sp 8
- Trilling, Diana. *Education—Mirror of Society*, S 23
- "Unillusioned" Generation, The*. Harold Taylor, S 19
- Vinogradoff, Vera D. *Who's Spoiled—Adolescents or their Parents?* W 22
- Who's Spoiled—Adolescents or their Parents?* Vera D. Vinogradoff, W 22
- Why Fairy Tales?* F 34
- Wolf, Anna W. M. *Helping Your Child to Understand Death*, W 36
- Zaki, Elinor Pettengill. *Time Out for Parents*, Sp 8

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### Note—publication delayed

*Facts of Life for Children*, CSAA's popular paperback, is temporarily out-of-print. A new edition, *What to Tell Your Children About Sex*, (\$.35) will be ready in January, 1959. In the meantime, we suggest the hard cover *Facts of Life* (\$2.75.) or *When Children Ask About Sex* (\$.30).